

# 6

## Women and Politics

### *Highlights*

- In 1974, Iowa women made up just 14 percent of those serving on state boards and commissions. In October 2003, that number reached 49 percent.
- In 2003, Iowa women comprised 21.3 percent of the state's General Assembly, up from 10.7 percent in 1977.
- In 2000, Iowa women made up 36 percent of all of the state's elected county officials.
- From 1990 to 2003, the number of women judges has increased in Iowa--from 5.5 percent to 17.8 percent of all judicial positions.
- The percentage of female registered voters who vote has dropped considerably since the 1984 general election, when 83 percent of female voters turned out at the polls. In 1996 and 2000, female voter turnout for the general election lagged at 72 percent.

## —Chapter 6—

# Women and Politics

## 6.1 Introduction

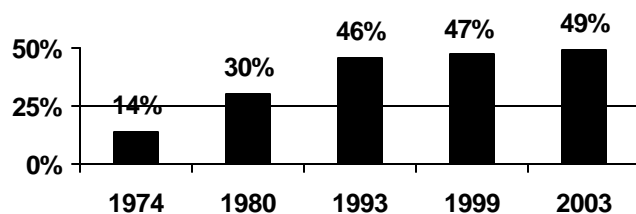
Women's involvement in all aspects of politics is crucial for the elevation of the status of women in Iowa and nationwide. Equal participation of women and men in politics will provide a necessary balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society. Although advances have been made in the number of Iowa women who hold public office or serve on state boards or commissions, they continue to be gravely underrepresented in the majority of the public decision-making bodies in the state.

## 6.2 State Boards and Commissions

The State of Iowa has made great strides over the past twenty-nine years in attaining equal gender representation on boards and commissions. In 1974, only 14 percent of all people on state boards and commissions were women. Governor appointments steadily increased that percentage until 1987, when Iowa's gender balance law was enacted—the first of its kind in the nation. As of October 1, 2003, 49 percent of members of Iowa's boards and commissions were female. (SEE FIGURES 6.1 and 6.2)

While Iowa has instituted gender balance on state boards and commissions, only one city in the state, Iowa City, has engendered such a policy.

**Figure 6.1**  
**PERCENTAGE OF FEMALES ON**  
**STATE BOARDS AND**  
**COMMISSIONS, IOWA, 1974-2003**



SOURCE: Office of the Governor

**Figure 6.2**  
**STATE BOARD AND COMMISSION**  
**MEMBERS BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2003**

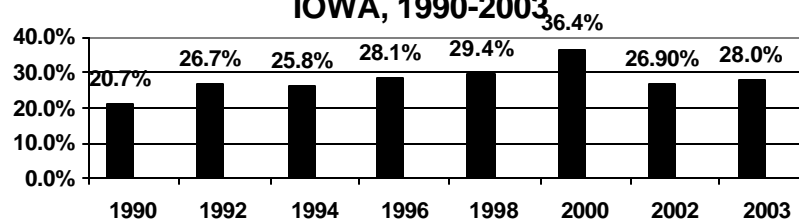
|                  | <u># OF MALES</u> | <u># OF FEMALES</u> |
|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| White            | 577               | 539                 |
| African American | 36                | 31                  |
| Asian American   | 6                 | 6                   |
| American Indian  | 2                 | 8                   |
| Latino           | 9                 | 9                   |
| Unknown          | 2                 | 3                   |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>632</b>        | <b>596</b>          |

SOURCE: Office of the Governor

## 6.3 State Department Directors

The number of women serving as state department directors has increased from 1989 to 2003. Department directors are Governor-appointed positions. In 1989, six women served as leaders of state agencies. As of October 2003, seven women led state departments: Administrative Services, Civil Rights, Cultural Affairs, Human Rights, Iowa Law Enforcement Academy, Management, and Public Health. (SEE FIGURE 6.3)

**Figure 6.3**  
**FEMALE STATE DEPARTMENT DIRECTORS,**  
**IOWA, 1990-2003**



Source: Iowa Official Register and Office of the Governor

## 6.4 Elective Public Office

Iowa's record of electing women to public office, both at the state and national levels, is fair. It is one of only five states that has failed to send a woman to the U.S. Congress, and it ranks 27th nationwide in the number of women that serve in state legislatures.

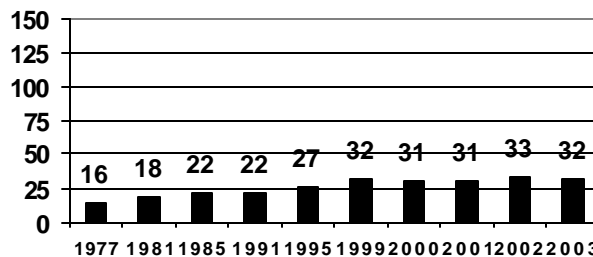
Since the first year in which a woman was elected to the Iowa General Assembly in 1929, the total percentage of women legislators has increased from .6 percent to 21.3 percent in 2003.

Even with this increase, women, who total 50.9 percent of Iowa's population, represent about one-fifth of the General Assembly. (SEE FIGURE 6.4) Seven women serve as Senators, while 25 serve as Representatives in 2003. Representation of women of color in the General Assembly is also deficient; only three women of color have served in the Iowa General Assembly. Furthermore, few Iowa women have served as elected state officials. (SEE FIGURE 6.5)

Likewise, few women lead Iowa's cities. According to the Iowa League of Cities, of the 948 cities in Iowa, 96 women serve as mayors in 2003.

Iowa's record of electing women to county offices surpasses its record of electing women to state and national offices. In 1996, 34 percent of all county elected offices in Iowa were held by females. Since 1970, there has been a continual increase in the percentage of women elected as county officials in the state. (SEE FIGURE 6.6)

**Figure 6.4**  
**FEMALES IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, IOWA, 1977-2003**



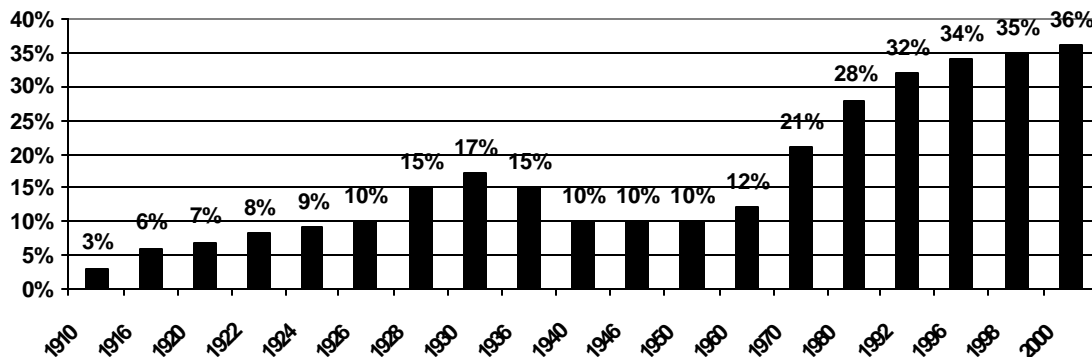
SOURCE: Suzanne O'Dea Schenken, *Legislators and Politicians: Iowa's Women Lawmakers, 1995* and the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, Iowa Department of Human Rights

**Figure 6.5**  
**FEMALE ELECTED OFFICIALS IOWA, THROUGH OCTOBER 2003**

| OFFICE                   | # OF MALES | # OF FEMALES |
|--------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Governor                 | 39         | 0            |
| Lieutenant Governor      | 41         | 3            |
| Secretary of State       | 25         | 3            |
| Treasurer                | 25         | 0            |
| Auditor                  | 30         | 0            |
| Secretary of Agriculture | 13         | 1            |
| Attorney General         | 31         | 1            |

SOURCE: Iowa Official Register

**Figure 6.6**  
**PERCENTAGE OF FEMALES IN ALL ELECTED COUNTY OFFICES, IOWA, 1910-2000**



Source: Melissa Fahr, Buena Vista University and Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, DHR

## 6.5 Judges

Although an increasing number of Iowa women have obtained law degrees over the past two decades and more women are serving as judges, still very few women are judges. Until recently, several types of judicial positions were held exclusively by men. That, however, is slowly beginning to change as Iowa is improving its representation of women on judicial seats.

According to the Iowa Judicial Branch, from 1990 to June 2003, women magistrate judges increased from 7 to 28; district associate judges from 5 to 12; district court judges from 4 to 15; and court of appeals from 1 to 3. There were no female senior judges in 1990 or 2003. (SEE FIGURE 6.7)

In 2003, women comprised 18.9 percent of the state judiciary positions, compared to 6 percent twelve years earlier.

**Figure 6.7**  
**FEMALE JUDGES, IOWA, 1990 AND 2003**

| <u>JUDICIAL SEATS</u> | <u>TOTAL JUDGES 1990</u> | <u>FEMALE JUDGES 1990</u> | <u>TOTAL JUDGES 2003</u> | <u>FEMALE JUDGES 2003</u> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Senior Judge          | 17                       | 0                         | 27                       | 0                         |
| Judicial Magistrate   | 146                      | 7                         | 133                      | 28                        |
| District Associate    | 46                       | 5                         | 54                       | 12                        |
| District Court        | 100                      | 4                         | 107                      | 15                        |
| Court of Appeals      | 6                        | 1                         | 9                        | 3                         |
| Supreme Court         | 9                        | 1                         | 7                        | 2                         |

**SOURCE: State Court Administrator**

## 6.6 Voters

In every presidential election since 1980, the proportion of eligible female adults who voted has exceeded the proportion of eligible male adults who voted. The number of female voters has exceeded the number of male voters in every presidential election since 1964. The same holds true for Iowa.

In 2000, women comprised the majority of registered voters in the state at approximately 53 percent, men totaling 47 percent, the same as in 1996 and 1984. Since women make up 50.9 percent and men 49.1 percent of the population of the state, Iowa women have a higher voter registration rate than men.

Iowa females also have a higher voter turnout rate than men. In the 2000 and 1996 presidential election, voter turnout was 72 percent for females and 70 percent for males. Nonetheless, this was down from the 1984 presidential election when 82 percent of female registered voters and 81 percent of males voted. (SEE FIGURE 6.8) According to a survey by The Women's Vote Project,

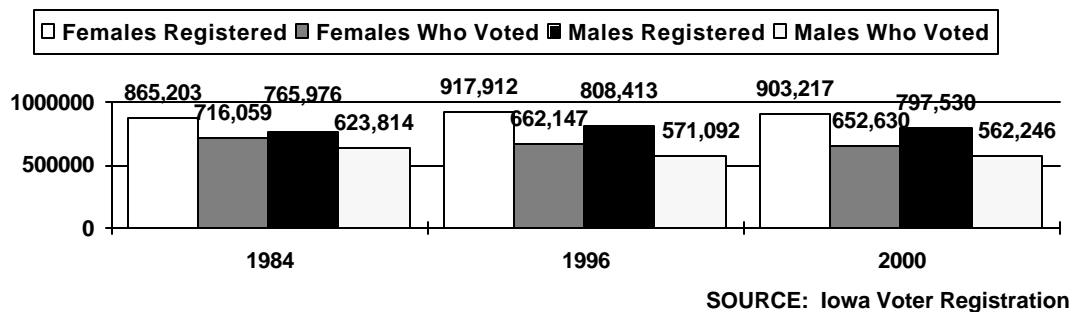
declining voter turnout for women can be attributed to several barriers, including getting time off work, finding child care, and lack of adequate information about candidates.<sup>3</sup> The survey also found that white women were more likely than African-American or Hispanic women to receive information by mail or phone about election issues.<sup>4</sup>

Young adults, aged 18 to 24, had the lowest turnout rate for both men and women, with just 42 and 44 percent, respectively, of those registered to vote casting ballots. This is a substantial drop since 1984 when 63 percent of women and 62 percent of men in that age group voted in the general election. The largest turnout of female registered voters in 2000 was in the 50 to 64 age category at 84 percent. For males, those 65 years and older showed the largest voter turnout at 84 percent. (SEE FIGURE 6.9)

Since 1994, both men and women have been leaving the rolls of registered Democrats and Republicans to register as No Party (Independent). From 1984 to 2000,

there was an increase of 53 percent of women registered as Independents, while male affiliation increased by 50 percent. In fact, more people are registered as Independent than either Republican or Democrat. (SEE FIGURES 6.10 and 6.11)

**Figure 6.8**  
**VOTER PARTICIPATION, IOWA, 1984, 1996, AND 2000**



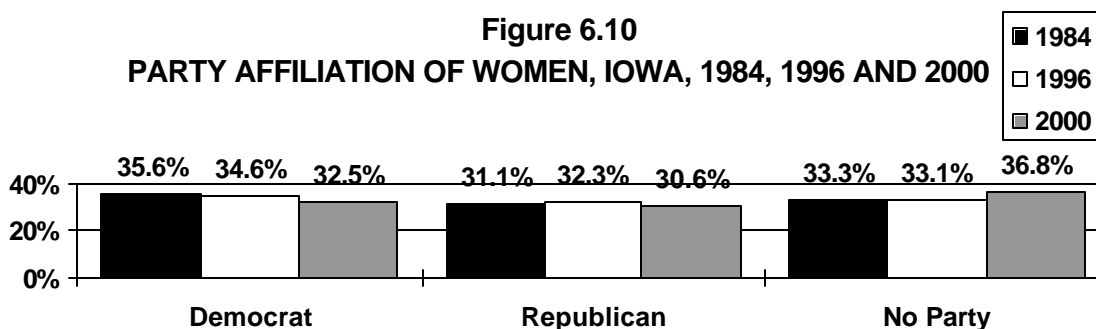
**Figure 6.9**  
**PERCENT OF REGISTERED VOTERS WHO VOTED BY GENDER, AGE, AND YEAR, IOWA, IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 1984, 1996, AND 2000**

|               | AGE | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-49 | 50-64 | 65+ | AGE UNKNOWN |
|---------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------------|
| <b>FEMALE</b> |     |       |       |       |       |     |             |
| 1984          |     | 63%   | 79%   | 87%   | 90%   | 85% | 76%         |
| 1996          |     | 40%   | 56%   | 76%   | 84%   | 82% | 18%         |
| 2000          |     | 44%   | 55%   | 75%   | 84%   | 81% | 8%          |
| <b>Male</b>   |     |       |       |       |       |     |             |
| 1984          |     | 62%   | 76%   | 85%   | 89%   | 88% | 49%         |
| 1996          |     | 38%   | 53%   | 74%   | 83%   | 85% | 11%         |
| 2000          |     | 42%   | 52%   | 73%   | 83%   | 84% | 0%          |

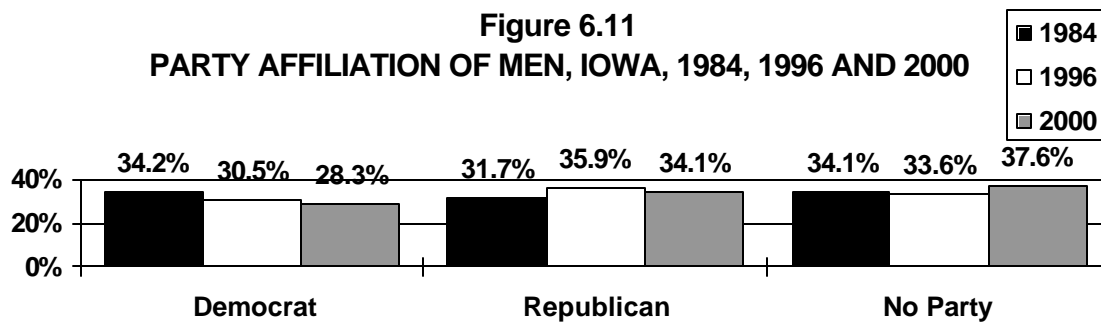
SEE TABLE 6.1 IN APPENDIX

SOURCE: Iowa Voter Registration

**Figure 6.10**  
**PARTY AFFILIATION OF WOMEN, IOWA, 1984, 1996 AND 2000**



**Figure 6.11**  
**PARTY AFFILIATION OF MEN, IOWA, 1984, 1996 AND 2000**



SEE TABLE 6.2 IN APPENDIX FOR 6.8 AND 6.9

SOURCE: Iowa Voter Registration

## 6.7 Forward-looking Strategies

- It is crucial that women's active participation and incorporation at all levels of decision making, including that of city and county governments, be promoted by the establishment of measures that would substantially increase the number of women who serve on community decision-making bodies. This could include a legislative mandate for gender-balanced boards and commissions on city and county levels.

- Women's service in state and national legislatures not only establishes a more representative governing body, but also works to advance the status of women in other ways. According to a national survey of women officeholders, women who hold elective office reshape the public policy agenda by giving a priority to women's rights policies and to women's traditional roles as caregivers in the family and society.<sup>5</sup> Women elective office holders also serve as role models for other women. According to a groundbreaking study by the National Women's Political Caucus in 1994, women who run for elective office win as often as men do.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, there are so few women in Iowa's elective offices because women just do not run. To encourage more women to run for office, work must be done to eliminate discriminatory attitudes and unequal gender power relations in private life that preface inequality in the public sphere.

- Education of judicial nominating commission members regarding the need to increase the number of women in the Iowa judiciary should be continued. Furthermore, the judicial nominating commission members need to be encouraged to give weight and consideration to relevant background and experience in the selection of candidates, rather than favoring the time served in a law office.

- Although the existence of a gender gap in voting has been debated since women won the right to vote in 1920, over the past two decades tangible political differences between women and men have increased.<sup>7</sup> (The gender gap refers to differences between women and men in their political attitudes and voting choices.) For example, in 2000, there was gender gap of 10-12 points during the presidential election, with women favoring Al Gore and men preferring George W. Bush.<sup>8</sup>

- Voter education at an early age is an important factor in getting people out to the voting booths. Education on the history of women's struggle to obtain the right to vote in the U.S. should be increased in Iowa's schools.

- Political parties and candidates must provide more equitable information by mail or phone to women of varying races and ethnicities.

<sup>1</sup>Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, *Iowa: Women in Elective Office - Historical Summary* accessed on <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cawp/facts/StbySt/IA.html> on July 2, 2002.

<sup>2</sup>Center for the American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, *Sex Differences in Voter Turnout*, 1997.

<sup>3</sup>The Women's Vote Project, survey conducted by Lake, Sosin, Snell, Perry, and Associates, 1997.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Center for the American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, *The Impact of Women in Public Office: An Overview*, 1991.

<sup>6</sup>National Women's Political Caucus, *Perception and Reality: A Study Comparing the Success of Men & Women Candidates*, 1994.

<sup>7</sup>Center for the American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, *Gender Gap in the 2002 Elections*.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter 6: Women and Politics

Table 6.1

REGISTERED VOTERS WHO VOTED BY GENDER, AGE, AND YEAR, IOWA, 1984, 1996 AND 2000

| <u>Age</u>  | <u>18-24</u> | <u>25-34</u> | <u>35-49</u> | <u>50-64</u> | <u>65+</u> | <u>Unknown</u> |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|----------------|
| Female 1984 | 73,333       | 146,267      | 178,620      | 157,363      | 160,625    | 211            |
| Female 1996 | 41,882       | 86,434       | 207,793      | 148,865      | 177,167    | 6              |
| Female 2000 | 47,548       | 78,190       | 196,209      | 159,415      | 171,265    | 3              |
| Male 1984   | 67,338       | 132,162      | 164,980      | 142,006      | 117,284    | 44             |
| Male 1996   | 37,368       | 75,407       | 190,657      | 136,226      | 131,432    | 2              |
| Male 2000   | 42,186       | 67,946       | 177,119      | 148,146      | 126,849    | 0              |

Table 6.2

PARTY AFFILIATION BY GENDER, IOWA, 1984, 1996 AND 2000

|             | <u>Democrat</u> | <u>Republican</u> | <u>No Party</u> |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Female 1984 | 259,574         | 235,575           | 220,910         |
| Female 1996 | 317,152         | 296,681           | 304,079         |
| Female 2000 | 293,929         | 276,823           | 332,465         |
| Male 1984   | 217,829         | 209,953           | 196,032         |
| Male 1996   | 185,631         | 232,434           | 153,027         |
| Male 2000   | 225,679         | 272,088           | 299,763         |